CLAIMS

1. A method of filling a flexible-walled container comprising the steps of:

(i) purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container by introducing an inert gas;

(ii) introducing a foodstuff into the container; and

(iii) sealing the container.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the step of introducing a foodstuff into the container is preceded by deploying the container from a folded to an unfolded configuration.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2, wherein the step of deploying the container from a folded to an unfolded configuration is achieved by means of gas inflation.

4. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is substantially entirely solid in state, the step of purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container is initiated before the step of introducing the solid foodstuff into the container.

5. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is substantially entirely solid in state, the steps of purging substantially all oxygen from the interior

of the container and introducing the solid foodstuff into the container are performed concurrently.

6. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein, if the introduced foodstuff is substantially entirely liquid in state, the step of purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container is initiated after the step of introducing the liquid foodstuff into the container.

7. A method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein, the step of introducing a foodstuff into the container involves the introduction of a substantially solid foodstuff followed by the introduction of a substantially liquid foodstuff; and wherein the step of purging substantially all oxygen from the interior of the container is ceased after the step of introducing the substantially solid foodstuff into the container.

8. A method as claimed in claim 4 or 5, wherein the container is inflated by an inert gas after introduction of the substantially solid foodstuff.

9. A method as claimed in claims 6 or 7, wherein the container is inflated by an inert gas after introduction of the substantially liquid foodstuff.

10. A method as claimed in claims 8 or 9, wherein the inert gas is introduced into the container by gas introduction means whilst the flexible wall of

the open end of the container is engaged tightly against the gas introduction means.

11. A method as claimed in claim 10, wherein the gas introduction means is a nozzle with a substantially flat opening.

12. A method as claimed in any of claims 8 to 11, wherein the container is inflated to a desired volume.

13. A method as claimed in any of claims 8 to 11, wherein the container is over-inflated beyond a desired volume.

14. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein a selected volume of the inert gas is subsequently removed from within the container.

15. A method as claimed in claim 14, wherein the selected volume is removed by mechanical squeezing of the flexible wall of the container.

16. A method as claimed in any of claims 8 to 15, wherein the step of sealing the container is performed whilst the container is at least partially inflated to thereby retain a selected volume of inert gas therein.

17. A method as claimed in claim 16, wherein the container is sealed by means of heat sealing.

18. A method as claimed in claim 16 or 17, wherein the volume of inert gas remaining within the container is selected to reduce agglomeration of discrete pieces of foodstuff.

19. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the foodstuff is cereal based.

20. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the cereal is selected from the group consisting of rice, couscous, wild rice, barley, wheat, oats, rye, millet and maize.

21. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the flexible-walled container is a plastics pouch.

22. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the inert gas is selected from the group consisting of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, helium, argon, neon and xenon.

23. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein oxygen gas forms less than 2% of the volume of gas within the container.

24. A method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein oxygen gas forms less than 1% of the volume of gas within the container.

25. A flexible-walled container filled by the method of any of claims 1 to 24.